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Before the Higher Education Committee

*In Support of **SB 936: An Act Concerning Workforce Development** with additions*

Senator Slap, Representative Haddad, and members of the Committee, my name is Andrea Thompson. I'm a licensed practical nurse at the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. I've worked as a nurse for 13 years, 6 of which have been at DMHAS.

I spent almost two years within the Addiction Services Division (ASD) at Connecticut Valley Hospital where they are operating at less than 50% capacity due to the state's staffing crisis. The addiction's division alone has 50 nurse vacancies, and around 350 entirely at the hospital. The waiting list at ASD is 12-weeks out and counting. The phones are ringing every minute with individuals looking for a bed or treatment. These are our neighbors, our family, our friends that are looking for help. If you know anyone suffering from addiction, you know that when they are ready, we need to make sure services are available. We are failing our state when ASD is operating at barely 50% because there are no nurses. The people who depend on our services are the most vulnerable. They have the highest acuity, are clinically complex, suffer from substance abuse and psychiatric needs; are hospitalized a lot and do not succeed at other outpatient places. Understand that these clients are often black, brown, and uninsured. As public sector services shrink, the problems grow. It's sad that the highest level of care for clients in need of addiction services is barely operating.

When there are not enough nurses, care is compromised. You cannot provide proper treatment to someone struggling with addictions as a nurse, when you are also passing meds, screening admissions, supervising, and running units in one shift. If we had more nurses and other healthcare staff, we would be able to treat more individuals in need of life saving care.

I am here to ask you to invest in our staff – by creating nursing pipelines from colleges to the public sector. Tap into the LPNs like me, and other mental health workers, who understand the needs of this population, to help train the new generation of nurses. Train registered nurses and establish a Preceptor program. Train and invest in the state workforce. Not only will it help build morale and provide growth for our current staff who have a unique diversity in our experience and knowledge, but we are here. Utilize us.

The public sector provides real equity for women and women of color. Equity in pay and equity in how we deliver these lifesaving services. We can be an asset for the state. Invest in us.